

Lives Up To Billing

Thomas Smash Hit; Draws 6,134 Here

By A. Kay Williams

Talented B. J. Thomas captivated an audience of 6,134 persons Thursday night at the Monroe Civic Center Arena. To put it mildly, Thomas was a "smash hit" and as his Monroe fans will testify, he lived up to the billing, "the superstar of tomorrow."

He opened his concert with the popular "Deep in the Eyes of A New York Woman," and "Light My Fire." Thomas, looking handsome indeed in a black crushed velvet tuxedo, displayed a confidence onstage that was most refreshing. His friendly, down-home attitude toward the audience seemed genuine and his personal remarks lent a relaxed air to the packed arena.

Audience Favorites

Thomas certainly knows how to put a song across, feeling every emotion in the lyrics, particularly in "I'm Gonna Make You Love Me" and "Everybody's Talking," from the movie "Midnight Cowboy." The audience favorites were Burt Bacharach's "This Guy's In Love With You" and, of course, the No. 1 song in the nation, "Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head."

The latter was such a favorite that Thomas sang it three separate times, once during the encore, which he deserved. He commented during the course of the performance that he had just gotten over a bout with the flu and that his throat was bothering him, but this didn't show in the least.

Thomas was backed by four young men, "The Arrangement," who were quite talented in their own right. They entertained previous to Thomas' appearance with swinging renditions of tunes such as "Feelin' Groovy," "Gentle On My Mind," and a medley of Beatle hits. The group included Howard Weems, organ, Joey Diamond, drums, Paul Arzaro, guitar, and Gary Dorian, bass.

Thomas was just as friendly and impressive offstage as well as on. When asked how it felt to hold the number one record in the nation, he replied, "To me, it's the ultimate in the life of a singer. It's really a great feeling to look on the national charts and see your hit at the top. It's just great."

Thomas, who has been singing for the past 12 years, says that his favorite audiences are college students, and he personally dedicated this concert to the students of NLSU. His future plans include television guest appearances on the Jimmy Durante and Lennon Sisters Show on March 1 and the

David Frost Show on the same date. As for future plans, he says, "I just want to sing." He should have no trouble being the showman that he is.

Also appearing during the show were two local rock bands, "Page Two" and "Becket." However, the anxiety in the audience to see B. J. Thomas overshadowed their performances — an unfortunate disadvantage, but not surprising.

Thomas "closed" the show exactly three times, returning onstage to enthusiastic applause for another number. The audience just wouldn't let him go. Requests for "Raindrops Falling On My Head" poured in, and he ended the show with the top song in the nation.

The B. J. Thomas Concert was sponsored by the Neils Corp., a local booking agency.